

Mr. Ford's Page

AT BOTTOM, nothing much matters in social affairs except the way in which men treat one another. Everything else swings around this. There may be scarcity or there may be plenty, but if the relations between men are full of confidence, if the sense of unity and reliability is broadcast among men, more than half the occasion for anxiety is removed. But though there be peace in the land and plenty everywhere, if there is not human concord, all material blessings are robbed of more than half their worth.

It is a great shock when the mind awakens to the fact that not all of humanity is human, that is, that whole groups of people do not regard others with humane feeling. Great efforts have been made to have this appear as the attitude of a class, but it is really the attitude of all "classes," in so far as they are swayed by the false notion of "classes." Before, when it was the constant effort of propaganda to make the people believe that it was only the "rich" who were without humane feelings, the opinion became general that among the "poor" the humane virtues flourished.

But the "rich" and the "poor" are both very small minorities, and you cannot classify society under these heads. There are not enough "rich" and there are not enough "poor" to serve that purpose. Rich men have become poor without changing their natures, and poor men have become rich, but the problem has been very little affected by it.

Between these two is the great mass of the people who are neither rich nor poor, and who never will be, for the reason that a society of millionaires would be bound to raise wheat and bake bread and make machinery and run trains if they were to have anything to live on, just as the present society has to do. And they will never be poor for the reason that they are willing to do their part in the world.

It is these people—the people—who give tone to the world. The press in its society columns may sometimes give the impression that the well-to-do are the important people, and the agitator may give the impression that the impoverished constitute the important element in the world. But both are minute sections of society; those who make the world go round, who give the flavor which social life possesses, are the masses who make up the great whole of the people.

No one can oppress the masses but themselves, and they do this by forgetting their oneness. Take it in industrial management, for example. With the best will in the world the head of a concern may adopt a policy of fair-dealing with men as individuals, only to find afterward that all down the line that policy has been wrecked by the bad temper or ill judgment of employees on whom the policy was dependent for its success. It was not the employer who created the unfair conditions, it was the employees. The relations between men in the shop are often more oppressive, more destructive of freedom and happiness in work, than are the relations between the managerial and the operative forces.

Until we begin to think of each other in our total relations as human beings, and get rid of the notion that the basis of our relations are coldly economic instead of warmly human, there is bound to be inner friction. And it is this inner friction that accounts for most of the anxiety and unhappiness of our everyday life.

It is time to utter a warning word both to employers and employees who consider themselves opposing forces, and who take advantage of "economic" changes to push the fight one against the other.

Just let your mind pass back to conditions in the United States at the beginning of the year. Labor was scarce then. Men threw up their jobs on the slightest pretext because they knew they could have their choice of five or six other jobs. There was a competitive bidding for men among some of the industries. Changes were so frequent and the per capita production slumped so seriously, that

anyone who knew anything at all knew that the time would inevitably come when those things would have to be paid for.

At that time, those who nurture the idea of "industrial war" as the normal condition between employer and employee were rather jubilant because they had the upper hand. Their tone was: "Now we have got the bosses where they have got to come to us; we can do with them what we like."

It was not wise, it was not humane; it was industrially suicidal. Worst of all, it revealed in a flash how little we really know about our relations one with another.

The time came when for all this carelessness everybody had to pay. And everybody is paying a little bit now. You cannot fling flour broadcast and expect the barrel to hold out for the baking, and you cannot fling time and material wages away and expect business to go on supporting that kind of thing. Indeed, society itself cannot support that system of things, and that is where the day of judgment dawns for such things—in society itself.

But now what do we see? Why, we see certain employers adopting precisely the same attitude and showing precisely the same temper as characterized the thoughtless workman earlier in the year. We see and hear signs of a thought like this: "The tide has turned; it is our innings now; we have got the workers where they will have to meet our terms."

It only needs to be stated thus baldly to enable everyone to see how wrong it all is.

It is a very great mistake, and it only goes to show how foolish we all are together.

There is no such thing as "getting even" in this way. Nobody ever "gets even" anyway; only nature and the moral law have control of the evening up process, and this process arises because all of us in our human relations have gone out of line.

When you try to "even the score," you only double it. The old law of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" meant, at the very best, two eyes instead of one, two teeth instead of one—doubling the evil instead of curing it.

The situation seems to be that, because of human folly in months past, natural law is now operating to bring matters back into equilibrium. But if, on account of this process, another portion of the industrial organization undertakes to have its little fling too, then it only means that natural law will have to come back again and, by another painful operation, restore the damage done by the second folly.

All of these matters are within human control. From the war and its antecedents, to all the consequences thereof, nothing has been inevitable in the absolute sense; all has originated in the human will unwisely directed.

If now human will and wisdom were directed in co-operation with the law of right relations, not only would the restorative process be comparatively brief, but there would be no relapses.

If any party gets the idea that now is its innings, then another party will strive hard for its innings again, and the consequence will be that the law of right relations will be constantly halting, checking and penalizing us. We are free to go as far as we like, but we are foolish to use that freedom to our own hurt or to the hurt of society at large. And free as we are, we are absolutely bound by the law that no one can prosper unless all prosper, and no one can suffer unless all suffer. Society is a living organism, and no system of capitalism can say, "We will feed the head and starve the hands," and no system of socialism can say, "We will feed the hands and starve the head," for whichever course you take of this character, all you succeed in doing is starving the whole social body.

Surely we have gone through enough to make us wiser than some present-day talk indicates.

THE highest human privilege is to learn. We are learning now that what we did last spring when jobs were plentiful was wrong. Whenever we do anything wrong, Nature holds court and assesses damages. Workmen said: "We have got the bosses where we want them;" they quit on any pretext; per capita production decreased. We should have learned something, for the consequences were not long in coming. But no; we now hear the same thing from some employers: "The tide is turned; the workmen will have to come to our terms." This is not "getting even"; it is doubling the evil. Why match one folly by another? Natural law will as quickly penalize society for the unwise employer as for the unwise employee. There are no "classes"; there is only human society. We prosper or suffer together. Let us be wise.